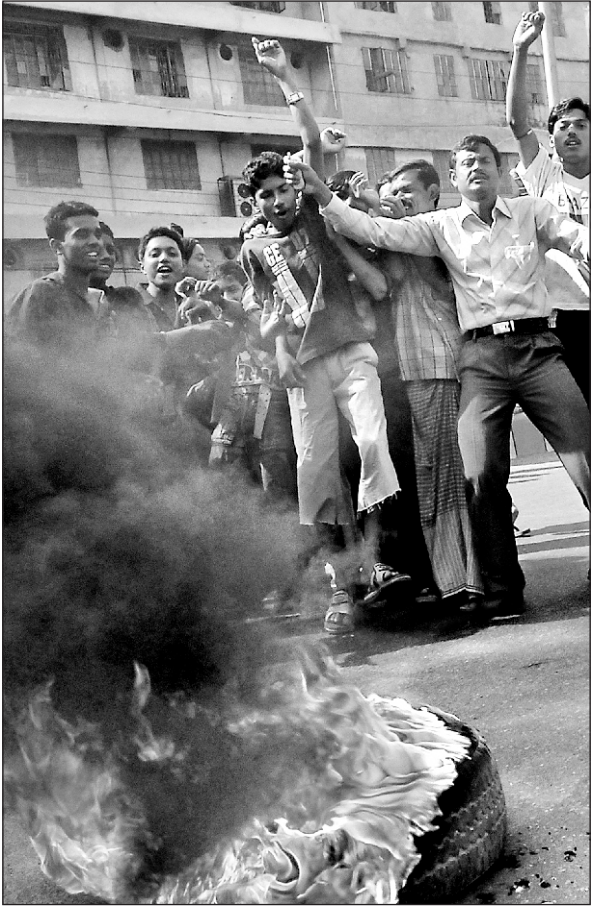


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Election at long last



The Awami League is going to participate in election but the crisis is still not over. Every politician is speaking in such a way that he/she is trying to pacify the current agitated state. But their activities are rather provoking than soothing. Our caretaker govt. seems to be very serious about overcoming the

recent disturbance. So they are providing package proposals. In every step they are trying to prove their neutrality. But it is very strange that their steps are satisfying for only BNP and their companions. On the other hand, AL has refused all proposals of peace. It seems they don't care for the people



or the country, all they want is to win the election and govern the country. And we, the general people of this country, have no options, cause most of the political parties are joining hands with either BNP or AL. But we have already seen the rule of BNP and AL. It seems other political parties are not realising this

fact. As a result, we have no viable alternative to think about.
Md. Towfiqul Islam
University of Dhaka

Even though there is a Caretaker Government (CTG) now in the country, its 10 Advisors are not part of the decision making process as is evident from the media reports. The matter has been further complicated by the fact that the President who was a nominee of the erstwhile BNP government, is also holding the post of Chief Advisor to the CTG. Naturally, BNP and Jamaat leaders have more access to him and their request/advice seem to carry more weight than that of Awami League and its partners! As a result, Awami League and like-minded parties feel left out of the decision making circle even now when the country is supposed to be run by a Non-Partisan CTG as they were understandably during the previous BNP-Jamaat government, whereas, the former ministers have remained almost as powerful as ever. In the meantime, Khaleda Zia is holding meetings with doctors, engineers, teachers, bank employees and others who are employed in govt. or semi-govt. organisations and paid from govt. revenues as if she is still the prime minister and asking for their votes in the next elections! During the previous CTG in 2001, more or less 1000 officials of various categories including Secretaries, Addl. Secretaries, Dy.

Commissioners, SPs, Upazila Nirbahi officers etc were transferred allegedly to create a level playing field for all during the elections. But this time only a few hundred officials have so far been transferred and already former ministers are raising a hue and cry that such transfers would create instability in the administration! Moreover, BNP's chosen officers are left undisturbed at Cabinet Div., Home, Establishment ministries and other places. The entire election running apparatus is still far from neutral. Moreover, reportedly there are 1.3 crore fake voters in the voters list, without deleting whom it would not be possible to hold a fair election. If true, this huge number of fake voters would tilt election results in favour of the parties responsible for their enrolment! Even in 2001 there were allegedly 60 lakh fake voters as claimed by Tareq Zia himself but that election was won by BNP by a very wide margin. In fact, BNP

securing about 47% of votes and won 216 seats, whereas, Awami League got only 62 seats in the parliament though they obtained 40% of the votes cast. This shows, perhaps, what fake votes can do in an election!

Abul Mohsin
Siddheswari Circular Road, Dhaka

It pains me to see that politicians are destroying our country, when at the same time, they all claim to be "patriotic" and "working" towards the "good" of the country and its people. The current electoral system of "winners take all" is not going to work, especially in a country like ours. Both parties will try anything including bending rules, organise blockade s and resort to violence to be in power. They know that if they are not in power this time, they will have to wait for another five years to get a chance to plunder the country. I have a solution. Why not bring in proportional representation to our

electoral system? Many countries have this system. Under proportional representation the parties will get parliament seats based on their share of actual votes. For example, if a party gets 55% of the votes, then it will be allocated 55% of the seats. In that way the looser, having say 45% votes, will be assured 45% of the seats. Combine that with a unity government concept and you will get a system where major parties (with coalitions) will always be in power. In a unity government premiership and other cabinet positions could be swapped at mid-term. If Bangladesh had this system I can bet my last dollar (or taka) that one would see less incentive to bend the rules, and effect blockades. And the ordinary folks could be left in peace to empower themselves to build a prosperous Bangladesh. Isn't it what the politicians claim to dream of?
Muhammad Islam
Houston, USA



'Stop AIDS, keep the promise'

The slogan of the World AIDS Campaign in 2001-2010 remains "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise". As part of this, World AIDS Day 2006 emphasises the theme of accountability. People and organisations around the world campaigned on 1 December 2006 to promote enhanced accountability from leaders on their commitments and generate greater public awareness and engagement on the problem of AIDS worldwide. HIV/AIDS is a burning issue for the world today. Just in the span of one decade AIDS has turned into a pandemic, affecting millions of men, women and children in all countries. Sexual intercourse without any protection, blood transfusions, pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding, sharing skin piercing or cutting instrument - needles, blades are the modes of transmission of HIV. In the air, HIV dies in a fraction of a second, in human blood, it can

survive for 24 to 72 hours. The HIV epidemic in Bangladesh, from an epidemiological perspective, is evolving rapidly. A low prevalence Bangladesh for overall HIV rates today does not guarantee low prevalence tomorrow. In the absence of good quality and high coverage intervention programmes, HIV prevalence may jump to very high levels within months. Policy makers and programmers within the government of Bangladesh, bi-lateral agencies, national and international NGOs have a key role to play in recognizing the urgency of the situation and taking immediate action. Currently there is no cure for AIDS; most victims eventually die. So, prevention is the only way to get rid of this fatal ailment. Are we doing enough to achieve that goal?
Shashi Khan, Battala, Tangail

Defending Razakars

The man I am talking about received compliments from the general public during the General Ershad's era because of his writing power and he showed for sure that the pen is mightier than the sword. Now I think how much was his price. Was it not affordable for Ershad? This man I am talking about now does not see any unjust activities of Khaleda and Nizami's conspiracy. He writes editorials and lies in his teeth using his magnificent writing power. Whatever the situation is now in our country, he has a goal in mind. He wants to see the 'Rajakar', Al-Badr in power again. He would certainly say, if people vote for them who you are to say anything? But my question, do people really vote for those Rajakars?
Shumon Alam
On e-mail

Advisers and journalists
The BNP chairperson Khaleda

Zia made an allegation against the advisers to the caretaker government that they (advisers) talk too much with the journalists. I do not think the advisers talk too much. They are honest and that is why they do not hesitate to talk with the journalists.
Dr. Mahboob Hossain
Associate Professor
Department of Pharmacy
The University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka

A suggestion

During the pre-election period, it is not uncommon to witness politicians vehemently promising how they will bring about economic and social developments, if elected. Most of these promises remain unfulfilled the targets that are met are usually vague ones, for instance, "reducing terrorism in the country". What could be done to improve this condition? Could we have something called specified mandatory goals to mend the problem? Specified mandatory goals will be specific targets that the politicians promise to fulfil by the end of the second year of the five-year term, if they

are elected to power. If they fail to meet these goals by the second year (or a specified date), they must step down and a new election will occur. For instance, they promise increased GDP by a given percentage. It is a specific goal that becomes mandatory for them to achieve. Failure to do so should result in an early removal from power and an enormous loss of public faith and support. As these goals will be chosen by the politicians themselves, they will be forced to think of promising something that will win them votes, but at the same time is realistic. At the end of the day the result will be greater competition among the political parties, but for once the public will enjoy the greatest benefits. The general people can rest assured that development will certainly occur in specified sectors of the economy. Of course, the most obvious difficulty of having something like this is arranging it. Secondly, a government may be fooled in their attempts to meet specified mandatory goals by sheer lack of cooperation from the opposi-

tion. However, if these problems can be tackled, then could the concept of specified mandatory goals be applied? It is simply a raw idea, and I leave it up to the readers to consider its possibilities.
Azhar Chowdhury
Class XII
Scholastica, Dhaka

NDI

With reference to the constant presence of the America-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) in the political scenario in Bangladesh, I would like to point out something that's often not apparent. While the NDI is a foreign non-profit based organisation in a first world democracy, we should not be fooled about its bona fides. The organisation is the international outreach arm of the Democratic Party and, as such, dedicated to a global left-of-the-centre agenda. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that the organisation always tacitly supports the relatively more leftist political forces in any country. It may be a good organisation but it is not a neutral one

by far.
Esam Sohail
Wichita, Kansas, USA

Advisers didn't 'hit back'

The news that "Advisers hit back, say they talk to press for free polls" did contain most of their comments in original, but was not probably a 'hit back' event (in my view). They have responded to the remarks made by the past PM. As I watched the TV interview, I found their remarks also contained some words (which were not quoted in your paper) in which they wanted to remain neutral and not to be seen as making a counter statement. Your supposition that they've 'hit back' runs contrary to that. I would urge the press to be more cautious in these difficult times and remain sensible while putting the story out and avoid pitting one against the other unintentionally.
MK, On e-mail



Role of Dr. Yunus

I would like to put emphasis on the opinion expressed by Dr Shah Alam (New Age 2-12-06). He has observed that the Nobel Prize for Peace has elevated Dr Yunus to great heights and endowed him with high moral authority. He can use this authority to help our nation at its present critical stage. We only want to believe he has the capacity to devise his own ways and do it. My feeling is that political parties and Bangabhaban authorities should invite Dr Yunus and/or anyone else they feel competent in the process of solving the political problems. All Advisers, delegates from major political parties, senior judges of the High Court, Attorney General, home and cabinet secretaries, and three heads of armed forces, and senior journalists may participate in a workshop, which would be managed by professional moderator(s) through pre-set and follow-up questions to obtain presumed results to be agreed upon by the delegates. If they fail to draw any conclusion they must agree with the next steps to be taken by the government. All recorded sessions of the workshop will conclude with clear-cut suggestions to all participating bodies about their rights and duties. The government may consider making public important parts of the records for civic information. Of course, it is a technical but helpful process to obtain optimum output with minimum misapprehension. There is no scope of denying the fact that constitutional framework has been broken down in the past few days like glass

pieces and recurrence of vandalism similar to High Court incident is feared anywhere anytime endangering valuable lives and state properties.
M Hoque
Gulbagh, Dhaka
*** We need an economist like Prof. Yunus to lead our country, to lead our people in the right path, to eradicate corruption from the roots. Prof. Yunus is the only person who has the brain and the heart to make our country the "Sonar Bangla" we dream of... a land where poverty would be a thing of the past. He would be the ideal leader as he truly feels for the poor and his banking empire is based on helping those in need. He does not know the meaning of greed and is a most loved person for his strong principles. If there is real democracy in our country, who would vote for the parties out to ruin it? Who can be a better person than Prof. Yunus to bring peace to our motherland? How unfortunate it is that the world has recognised him for his great work to eradicate poverty, to bring peace to the world... YET his own country is not able to make use of such a talent for its own development.
Ria Mizan
Sydney
*** I went to the Zia International Airport on 31 October night to have a glimpse of the great winner of the 2006 Peace Noble Prize Dr. Muhammad Yunus. I was ready to greet him with flowers. He

asked me why I was standing outside the airport so late at night. He also wanted to know my profession. I humbly introduced myself as a businessman and social worker and mentioned his great contribution to our society, particularly in eradicating poverty. I met him for the first time in my life though I had long been an admirer of this man. I saw on television Dr Yunus talking with poor rural women. But I did not know then what was micro credit. But the experts in the developed world did realise what a wonderful

mechanism he had developed to alleviate poverty. He is a true liberator of our poor rural women. They have broken the barriers of superstitions and come out of the poverty cycle. We have not yet been able to assess his contribution properly. But his universal recognition as the banker of the poor should make us proud and enable us to realise what he has done for our country. Today Prof. Yunus is a great Noble laureate to the world at large.
Touhidul Abedin,
Naya Paltan, Dhaka

